



**Remarks by John V. Cogbill, III
Opening of Pennsylvania Avenue for Pedestrian Enjoyment
Tuesday, November 9, 2004
(As Prepared)**

There are many people gathered here today who deserve our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. On behalf of the National Capital Planning Commission, I congratulate all who helped make this project a success.

I sincerely thank Administrator Peters and the Federal Highway Administration for their hard work and for hosting this event to celebrate the Avenue's magnificent new look. I believe no other agency could have achieved this outstanding result.

I especially wish to thank First Lady Laura Bush. In large part, the vision of an Avenue for the People is now a reality due to her leadership and support. We are all indebted to you Mrs. Bush for your commitment to this project and for your interest in preserving one of our most treasured landmarks.

Today is a historic day for America. After years of planning, Pennsylvania Avenue is once again a welcoming place for all to enjoy. A dignified civic space now graces the avenue where just a short time ago, unsightly security barriers cluttered the street.

In recent years we have all been challenged to find acceptable ways to protect Washington against unprecedented threats. But it is vital that we do so without sacrificing the very values we cherish—accessibility, openness, and civic beauty.

When an increasing number of barriers began to mar the beauty of this avenue, NCPC initiated an effort to create a dignified pedestrian space for America’s Main Street. Bringing together dozens of stakeholders and a talented designer, NCPC set the stage for change.

We envisioned a setting that would honor views to the U.S. Capitol; preserve the historic integrity of the street; and provide an enjoyable promenade. Standing here right now, we all see the result of this vision—a vision that I believe stands out for its graceful simplicity and its respect for the historic integrity of the site.

The success of this effort resonates far beyond these two blocks and marks a turning point in the nation’s capital. It reaffirms that public spaces can be both secure and welcoming. It demonstrates that the United States will not allow fear to undermine the integrity of the White House setting—the “people’s place.” It shows that effective security can be thoughtfully designed to blend into the city’s architecture and streetscapes.

I conclude by acknowledging the efforts of the key partners who worked tirelessly on this effort. NCPC Commissioner and Interagency Security Task Force Chairman Richard Friedman, my friend and colleague who worked so hard for this project; the District of Columbia; the National Park Service; the United States Secret Service; landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh; and the Federal Highway Administration, which took up the baton in the final stage and transformed the ground upon which we now stand.

Less than a year since breaking ground, the avenue is one of which we can all be proud. I would now like to introduce the principal designer of this historic undertaking, Michael Van Valkenburgh of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates.